

STATINTL

Those Federal Sneaks

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By instinct and tradition, Americans hate a sneak. Nobody is ever very surprised to learn that the words "sneak" and "snake" have descended to us from a single old Teutonic root "Sniken" — meaning to crawl or creep.

Given our instinct, — plus what's left of our traditions — the sweetest news this chilly spring is the sudden visibility of the whole creepy, crawly, shifty, shabby, underhanded apparatus of official U. S. sneakery.

"They sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men," says the Bible. And our government has followed suit, especially in the feigning of just — or even rational — motives. There appears to be not only an FBI agent behind every mailbox but a frantically busy "Red squad" in every village and town.

The good folk whose bumper stickers implore you to "Support Your Local Police" are now finding the police supporting them. Local constabularies are now receiving special funds to recruit and pay secret informers.

But soon the informer may be running for cover. According to Frank Donner's splendid piece on surveillance in a recent New York Review of Books, the indignant citizens who pilfered the files of the FBI office in Media, Pa., will soon be relasing the names of FBI informers. That agent lurking behind your mailbox may shortly be lurking behind a palm tree in some banana republic, and glad of the job. Sneaks, when exposed, are rarely praised by neighbors for their gallant actions.

Incredible as it seems, no less than 20 federal agencies are now engaged in spying on all of us, including, one supposes, whole legions of spies who don't know they're being spied on. It could all be dismissed as a rollicking game — were it not so sinister.

The agencies now stuffing their data banks with tiresome facts about you and me include: the FBI, the Army, the CIA, the Secret Service, Internal Revenue, the Intelligence Division of the State Department, and the Department of Justice. In nine cases out of 10, such surveillance probably is illegal.

but it goes on and will continue to go on until irate citizens demand that it be topped.

Considering the paranoia, not to say sheer lunacy, that prevails in this spy network, you would have to be blind and dumb and living in a hollow tree to escape being watched by a creature the FBI calls an "Informant" and decent people still call a sneak.

If you've led a busy, useful life and you've not made it to the Agitator Index, the Suspected Subversive File or the Persons of Interest List, well, you must be doing something wrong. And you are clearly remiss in one of your prime duties as a citizen, which is to give J. Edgar Hoover's agents something to do.

It isn't necessary to be a Black Panther or a peace marcher to be classed as "suspicious" by the FBI. "Political intelligence indiscriminately sweeps into its net the mild dissenters along with those drawn to violence," Donner tells us. "Thus peaceful, moderate, lawful organizations — from the NAACP to the Fellowship of Reconciliation — become intelligence targets on the theory that they are linked to communism or subversion."

Equating dissent with subversion has always been the custom of the radical right, and of all mindless reactionaries. To deny the right to dissent is to deny the need for social change. And that, of course, is what too many government agencies are as their highest duty.

One of the more distasteful aspects of the FBI's surveillance program is its corruption — no other word will do — of young students. Bureau agents now are authorized to recruit informers from junior colleges, youngsters 18 and 19. These junior agents are classed as PSI (Potential Security Informant) or PRI (Potential Racial Informant).

Time was when I thought we were living in a PPS (Potential Police State). Now I know it's simply a PS, and has been for some time.

Horrrifying as it is to realize that the American society has decayed through the growing power of a domestic spy system, it is perhaps more chilling

ing to discover what the CIA is up to all around the world.

On television a few years ago, Sen. Wayne Morse blamed the "credibility chasm" in American opinion on the evil work of the CIA. On the Dick Cavett Show we heard Capt. Robert Marasco of the Green Berets tell in detail how he murdered a "triple agent" in Vietnam. He committed this murder, he said, because the CIA had ordered him to do so. "But, why?" persisted Cavett and guest Brian Bedford. "Because he was my agent," came the answer.

Capt. Marasco also charged in the course of this appalling interview, that the CIA had arranged the auto accident, that very nearly killed him last year. Why? Well, maybe because he was no longer their agent. And he knew too much. Could there be any more terrifying commentary on the state of the union in this year 1971?